



## Reclaiming Arkansas Education Overview

In 2023 under Governor Sanders' LEARNS Act, the largest and most comprehensive education reform was signed into law. Arkansas has since implemented a unified systems approach centered on academic outcomes, transparency, accountability, and choice. Arkansas has a clear vision that every student enters kindergarten ready to learn and leaves ready for enlistment, enrollment or employment.

**All of ADE's work is aligned to deliver on this vision for students.** In just three years, Arkansas has achieved notable progress including working with over 3,000 educators to advance each aspect of LEARNS:

- **Preparing Young Learners:** Over 43,000 children from low-income families have access to early childhood education, reflecting Arkansas's investments to ensure students enter kindergarten ready to succeed.
- **Improving Academic Mastery:** Student achievement in English language arts, math, and science has consistently increased since 2024, as measured by statewide assessments.
- **Revamping a new State Accountability and Support System:** For the first time, Arkansas began awarding district letter grades based on student academic outcomes, providing clear indicators of areas of success and opportunities for improvement.
- **Delivering Targeted Student Support:** As of the 2025–2026 school year, Arkansas has provided high-impact tutoring during the school day to more than 47,500 students and Literacy Tutoring Grants to more than 18,244 families. 74% increase from the previous year. Literacy coaches are now supporting teachers in every D- and F-rated school across the state.
- **Investing in Educators:** Arkansas has enhanced support for educators by raising the minimum teacher salary to \$50,000, introducing 12 weeks of maternity leave, expanding scholarship opportunities, and launching the Teacher Merit Incentive Fund. In the 2024–25 school year, over 4,000 of the state's top teachers received merit pay bonuses of up to \$10,000, marking a 45% increase from the previous year.
- **Empowering Families:** The state has broadened access and provides more information about high-quality school choice options, including public school choice, charter schools, and Educational Freedom Accounts.

To promote the goals of Arkansas LEARNS, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) has implemented a Unified Statewide Accountability and Support Plan. This plan identifies a greater number of schools and students in need of support than what is required by the federal model. The overarching goal is to prepare every student to graduate ready for enlistment, enrollment in higher education, or employment.

The objectives of Arkansas reclaiming education are as follows:

- **Empower** school districts with greater flexibility to allocate resources based on student needs, minimizing the time spent on excessive paperwork.
- **Establish** a single, comprehensive district strategic plan (AR App) to streamline processes and reduce administrative burdens.
- **Enable** educators to dedicate more attention to students rather than focusing primarily on compliance requirements.
- **Utilize** a unified, transparent statewide system to identify and provide support to schools, replacing the need to manage separate state and federal accountability systems.
- **Expand** access to accelerated coursework without requiring extra tests that don't add value for students.

To carry out Arkansas' Unified Statewide Accountability and Support Plan, Arkansas is formally submitting a cohesive plan with several key requests for consideration by the U.S. Department of Education (USED). These requests are intended to provide the necessary flexibility and support to ensure the plan's successful implementation across the state.

- **A Returning Education to the States Waiver**, which will allow Arkansas to block and align federal funds with programs and strategies that best serve Arkansas students.
- **An Ed-Flex Waiver** provides school districts with additional flexibility in the use of federal education funds, supporting local decision-making and innovation.
- **A Revised Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) plan**, designed to enhance accountability measures and target school improvement efforts more effectively.

Together, these requests are designed to move decision-making out of Washington DC and back to Arkansas communities so they can focus on what matters most: ensuring every child has access to a high-quality education and the opportunity to succeed.

Parents, educators, and community members may share feedback by submitting public comments [here](#). Public comment will be open from April 7, 2026 through May 7, 2026. After the public comment period, ADE will submit its unified funding and accountability plan to the US Department of Education for approval.